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NJMC Receives Preliminary Results Of Meadowlands Air Quality Study

LYNDHURST, N.J. – The New Jersey Meadowlands Commission today received preliminary results of a comprehensive three-year air quality study of the Meadowlands District. This initial data shows the air quality in the Meadowlands region is comparable to other urban areas not only in New Jersey but across the country, as well as revealing the District itself is not a source for pollution.

“These preliminary results give us a picture of the challenges we face as one of the nation’s largest urban wetland areas. They are eye-opening in regards to the importance of reducing emissions from our environment,” said NJMC Chair Susan Bass Levin, also the state Department of Community Affairs Commissioner. “This data reinforces the logic which led this agency to place 8,400 acres under the protection of zoning for preservation and our effort to focus redevelopment to existing transportation corridors and transit oriented locations where the impact on roadways is more controlled. We went from a Master Plan that called for 70,000 units of housing to one where we are seeing about 5,000. We went from 113 million square feet of development, to a more sensible maximum number of 28 million square feet.”

Initial results show mobile sources have the most impact on air quality of the Meadowlands District, which is surrounded by the greater New York/Newark metropolitan area and crossed by the New Jersey Turnpike and other transportation corridors. Initial results show concentrations of pollutants similar to other urban areas such as Elizabeth, Houston and Los Angeles. Many of the compounds found, including toluene, benzene, trimethylbenzene and ethylbenzene, are byproducts of fuel combustion or industry. There were no major differences in the levels of emissions detected between the various stationary sites and the different areas where personal sampling was conducted.

“We are already undertaking major initiatives that promote cleaner air and a healthier environment in general,” said NJMC Executive Director Robert Ceberio. “The results presented today show that we cannot become complacent with current progress and must do more. Today we will move forward with pioneering new ways to improve air quality and continue to lay the foundation for the further recovery of the Meadowlands.”

The study - titled Baseline Quality of Ambient and Personal Air within the New Jersey Meadowlands District: A Measurements and Modeling Program - was conducted by scientists from the Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences Institute at UMDNJ-

Robert Wood Johnson Medical School of Piscataway, along with scientists from the Meadowlands Environmental Research Institute, the scientific arm of the NJMC, and Rutgers University. The results present the findings from the first year of the study conducted during 2005.

During the three-year study, the air quality of the Meadowlands District is being examined for toxins and pollutants, including measurements for exposure for specific human activities in the Meadowlands. Long-term data is needed to assess human risk to exposure, and more conclusive results will be available at the completion of the study. In addition, the data collected from this study will be compared with data from existing national databases on emissions to create a model that will project the impact of future preservation and redevelopment efforts on air quality.

Samples were taken every six days for a 48-hour period from stationary monitoring stations located at DeKorte Park in Lyndhurst, the Meadowlands Sports Complex in East Rutherford, Laurel Hill County Park in Secaucus and the 1-A Landfill in Kearny. Scientists also wore personal monitoring devices which sampled air while walking along trails at Mill Creek Marsh and Secaucus High School, Losen Slote Creek Park in Little Ferry, The Erie Landfill and Harrier Meadow in North Arlington and DeKorte Park in Lyndhurst.

This study is part of a series of studies by the NJMC to establish baseline environmental data to monitor the progress of the health of the Meadowlands. Water quality is being monitored 24 hours a day via monitors at several locations along the Hackensack River. Two studies by the New Jersey Audubon Society are examining the diversity and health of avian species found in the Meadowlands. An aquatic life survey was completed last year, and a biodiversity study is under way.

“While we must continue to meet the need for affordable housing and economic growth that supports communities, we need to redouble our efforts in entering the dialog for better transportation options that emphasize transit and mass transportation,” said Levin. “We must also think nationally about the impacts on our air quality that come from outside the state and take stronger steps as a nation.”

Earlier this year, the NJMC announced plans to establish a photovoltaic energy array on property and land owned by the energy which will produce 5 Megawatts of clean energy. A facility of this size would be equivalent to 626 fewer cars or 447 SUVs on the road each year or planting 970 acres of trees. Further plans look to generate 20 MW of renewable energy in the district by the year 2020 by working with the 14 Meadowlands municipalities, their boards of education, other agencies, businesses and developers.

The NJMC Board of Commissioners also approved a feasibility study to examine the potential of recycling landfill gas into liquid methane to more cleanly fuel trucks without tapping into imported sources of fuel. Vehicles that run on natural gas are cleaner, quieter and reduce the need for oil. The Commissioners also approved a demonstration project to convert leachate to gray water to be used at the future golf course at the 1-E Landfill in North Arlington and Kearny.

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